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The Christian Radical



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WE BELIEVE SO WE SPEAK
2ND CORINTHIANS 4:13



Celebrating Advent with President-Elect Obama

Frank Cordaro

(Reprinted with gratituge from the December, 2008, issue of the *via pacis*, the Des Moines Catholic Worker newsletter)

Throughout our 75-year history--as many in the Catholic Worker movement know--there has been rife discussion about the pros and cons of voting and the electoral politics that come with it. The Catholic Worker movement is a "personalist" movement, and personalism effectuated in the political arena depicts Catholic Workers as Christian Anarchists. For me, identifying as an anarchist has always been more functional than philosophical. Were a government, on a decentralized human scale, to actually function nonviolently and in the best interest of its people (starting from the bottom up), I could and would support that government.

Founders and many leading lights of the Catholic Worker movement have taken a dim view of the whole voting process. Even though Dorothy Day's first arrest and imprisonment were at the White House as a suffragette, she never voted and was fond of saying, "Don't vote. It just encourages them." And, Ammon Hennessey, who never voted either, recommended we use our bodies as ballots, "Cast that body ballot on behalf of the people around you every day of your life, every day, and don't let anybody ever tell you that you haven't voted."

These "to vote or not to vote" discussions are most intense during the presidential election cycles. This was especially true this time around, and I'm thankful the ordeal wrought by the two-year campaign is finally over. (We in Iowa get an even earlier measure of election madness with our first-in-the-nation caucuses.)

Now that Barack Obama is our President-Elect, the nation is assessing what it means to have elected for the first time an African American to the highest office in the land. It is only by an accident of divine providence that as the nation assesses the Obama win, the Church is celebrating the season of Advent.

Advent is the four-week period before Christmas in which the Church invites us to do the necessary spiritual work that is preparation for the celebration of Christmas. Advent may be the most invisible and non-practiced liturgical

season in the U.S. Christian calendar. Coincidentally, Christmas is the most visible and practiced holiday in the U.S.

How does this happen? Beyond the token recognition that December 25th is the day Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Christmas season in this nation is completely overtaken by our secular consumer culture. The Christmas season is the make or break period for our entire consumer economy. Forty percent of all retail sales in this country are made in the month of December. Advent's timing almost perfectly coincides with the American holiday/consumer season, which begins the day after Thanksgiving when the retail buy, buy, buy frenzy officially commences. There is literally no time on Main Street or Wall Street to celebrate Advent.

More to the point, our consumer based Christmas is far too important for the health and wellbeing of the USA economy and the Empire it sustains to allow any thing near an authentic celebration of Advent to take place.

In order to celebrate the true meaning of Advent, this must be done from the margins and spaces hidden away from the dominant cultural landscape. Yet with the election of Barack Obama as our first African American president we have a factor to add to our Advent spiritual mix that we've never had before.

A proper celebration of Advent must be done with a three-tense sense awareness of the three comings of Jesus in the past, the present, and the future. The first or past tense is the celebration of the birth of Jesus as retold in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The second or the present tense is in the here and now, or where we seek and find Jesus as he is manifested in the human family today. The third or future tense is the celebration of the promised return of Jesus during what is often called the "End Times," or more accurately understood as the Great Transformation. In this future time the Reign of God and the Lordship of Jesus are finally established. All false kingdoms, their "powers and principalities," are overcome, culminating in the death of death itself, death being the final or ultimate ungodly power and principality.

As a Christian seeking to observe and celebrate all three comings of Jesus, I know some ideas of what I'm looking for. At the same time, I also have some

idea of what I don't know to be looking for as we embrace the spirit of this Advent season.

I find what I know to look for in the first coming of Jesus, through the accounts of Jesus birth in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. I know that Jesus was born in a manger to a family of poor peasant stock and lived as a Jew in an occupied homeland. Jesus and his people suffered great oppression under the rule of the Roman Empire and its Jewish collaborators. When information of his birth reached the political rulers of the day were threatened and ordered the slaughter of infants born in the region, forcing the family of Jesus to become political refugees as they fled with him to a strange land. Innocent children were killed by a local war lord and agent of the Roman Empire in his absence. The accounts of these murders of the innocents in Matthew and Luke prefigure the adult life and ministry of Jesus Christ recorded in all four gospels.

What is also known by a growing number of committed Christians--but by no means the majority of those who self-identify as Christians--is that the infant massacre narrative and the subsequent Gospel accounts of the teachings of Jesus, paint a picture the teacher and a New Testament church that was an anti-empirical, grass-roots, bottom-up cultural movement that was intentionally and directly at odds with and in opposition to the Roman Empire. A review of the titles ascribed to Jesus in the Christmas stories, with the help of modern scriptural scholarship, reveals ascriptions such as "Messiah," "Lord," "Son of God," "King of the Jews," "Light of the World," "Redeemer," "Liberator," and "Savior of the World" were the same titles the Roman Empire conferred upon Caesar. And, the Caesar of Jesus's day did not take lightly competing claims for the allegiance of the people under his control.

The allegiance Jesus called for in the New Testament is more profound than a simple proclamation of "faith" in Jesus as a personal Savior, and it is deeper than a belief in any creed or set of dogmas as commonly understood. The allegiance to Jesus called for in the New Testament is an allegiance to a concrete divine plan that was both demanding and dangerous. The authors of the New Testament were keenly aware that there was a competing and different divine plan to the one they were presenting. The singular dominating divine plan of the day was Caesar's and the Roman Empire's. Any other claimant to Rome's divine view was targeted for elimination.

Caesar's divine plan and worldly kingdom was based on violent Gods of power and domination. Belief in Caesar's deities meant using violent methods of worldly powers, confronting any and all enemies with these violent means and trusting that your Gods will ensure your victory. When violence won a battle (as was the case for Rome in Jesus's day), the Romans declared this to be "God's peace." And, the sitting Caesar was proclaimed the most favored one or the "son" of God. Caesar and the Roman Empire's divine plan was a top-down system in which the most favored people in the Roman divine plan were also the richest and most powerful. Those at the top of this pyramid of privilege were fully confident in their divine selection and more than willing to use the means of "redemptive" violence to certify their divine favor and just causes.

Jesus's divine plan and worldly kingdom is wholly different. It is based on a singular God who loves unconditionally and offers unlimited forgiveness. Jesus's divine peace plan is based on people seeking justice by means other than the justice sought through violence. The justice of the Jesus plan calls for the use of non-violent means. It calls us to resist our enemies by loving them. Jesus' divine plan of redemptive suffering illustrated on the cross and professed in our Christian creeds and dogmas was not meant to end with his death. It was intended to be repeated by his followers, each was to pick up his or her cross and follow in those steps.

The justice in the Jesus plan is rooted in the equality that all people share before an all loving and forgiving God, each one created in God's image. The favored of humanity in Jesus's kingdom are those at the bottom of the privilege pyramid. As God's favored, they have a greater claim on the followers of Jesus and until their basic human needs are met, until they live with dignity, respect and freedom from oppression, the work of the people of Jesus is not done.

One commonality in both Caesar's and Jesus's divine plans is the expectation that their followers be willing to die for their cause. The biggest difference between their plans is that Caesar would have his followers kill for him, and Jesus would not.

What I also know about the season of Advent from my search for Jesus in the world is revealed to me through the poor we serve at the Des Moines Catholic

Worker, in the jails in which I've done time, in the meager witnesses I've made to resist war and Empire, and in my inadequate efforts to live lovingly in community. In these places I find the "least of these" of today are treated about the same way that the historical Jesus was treated in the New Testament era. I must rush to confess I personally fall far short of the mark set by Jesus and the New Testament church in living out the divine plan of Jesus. Still, though I fail miserably along the way, I cannot let these failures allow me to abandon my allegiance to Jesus and the claim his divine plan has on me as I try again and again to live the Gospel dictates of unconditional love, unlimited forgiveness, radical equalitarianism and deferring always in human interactions from the bottom up.

I also know that in this so-called Christian nation, with its many Christian denominations, Catholicism being one of them, when it comes to God and country, what is called Christianity is really an allegiance to PAX USA with its blind nationalism and rampant militarism.

What I *don't* know in this Advent season has to do with the future tense of Jesus's coming. What I don't know is when and how the Great Transformation is going to come about.

This is what makes President-Elect Barack Obama such an enigma and a paradox for me this Advent season. After years of schooling myself to take on the mindset of the divine plan of Jesus in opposition to the societal norm with all the cultural trappings of USA-empire-mania, I find myself asking. "Could a President Barack Obama be an agent for the Great Transformation for which we are all looking?" Might he, from the most unlikely of place, as President and Commander in Chef of the richest, the strongest and most powerful and violent nation in the world, the Roman Empire of our times, be a partner to those seeking to nonviolently dismantle the very Empire that he has been elected President to run?

First, it is likely obvious to all that Barack Obama will be a much better president than George W. Bush. The past eight years have been god-awful. Bush set the bar so low, how could Obama possibly slide under it?

Secondly and more importantly, Barack Obama is Black. His election represents a sea change in the physiological and moral landscape of our national consciousness. The stain of slavery and the reality of racism are deeply imbedded in our history, and electing an African American President is a critical step in putting this shameless past behind us. This fact is not lost on the rest of the world. Barack Obama represents perhaps the last real chance for the U.S. to do right and change its imperial ways. At least that is how many peoples of the world are viewing his election. Like most people, I too want to believe this is true.

On the other hand there is nothing Barack Obama has said during his campaign or in his written positions on policy and governing that suggest he will be about the dismantling of the United States Empire. Quite the opposite, in fact. What I have heard from Barack Obama is that he and his administration want to manage the existing U.S. Empire in a far better and more enlightened way. Under a Barack Obama presidency, the U.S. Empire will be friendlier and more cooperative with other nations. Yet, it will still maintain its nuclear arsenal and the STRATCom in Omaha. Moreover, Obama states he wants to increase the size of the military and shift the hot war in Iraq to Afghanistan. From all indicators given the economic situation, the Wall Street elites have nothing to fear from a President Obama. He may need to change some of the economic rules but the Global Economy and the corporate structure it maintains will stay the same during an Obama administration. I could go on and on, but suffice it to say that the Obama plan as he currently describes it is not good enough, not even close.

Still, anything can happen. If the Advent season means anything at all, it means to stay open to surprises. My faith in the Great Transformation of the human world order is tied to my faith in the Easter Resurrection of a dead Jesus. There was no greater surprise than the empty tomb on Easter morning. My spiritual Advent task is to be open to surprises and keep living out the Gospel mandates as best I can, resisting the U.S. Empire from the inside out. If in the process President Barack Obama is a help in this effort, I say "Amen." If he is not, I still say "Amen." Regardless of who is president of the United States, the Great Transformation will take place. The Reign God and the Lordship of Jesus will be established, period. This will happen with or without the help of Barack Obama or for that matter or with or without the help any established church or

group or even Frank Cordaro. It will happen as souls answer correctly the central questions of advent facing each follower of Jesus, President Barack Obama and myself, "What divine program do I choose. Do I give my allegiance to Caesar or Jesus?" *



A Meditation on Divine Love

Rob Quin

So last night I was with a pack of kids from a local church and the topic of love came up. I forget who said what, but someone threw out there that love is a choice. They tried to explain that love is a choice we all make, and that we have to choose to love God. That love can be broken down into logical proofs and deductions.

This infuriated me.

Love may indeed be expressed in choices. But it is not just choices. It is the force that pushes you to make the choices.

Just before I left Van, God let me see a glimpse of what His love looks like. It did not look like systematic theology.

It was a feeling; a brilliant, overwhelming, fireball of regard. An intensely deep understanding of how... amazing people are. How valuable they are. It was a lurch in my heart. It was like this:

Love is that which destroys and renews us, a moment in time when we get the absolute, inexpressible worth of another human being, and in that moment, when we understand that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, too good for them, giving it to them is as natural as breathing.

How can you stand still and NOT reach out? How can you NOT bless, NOT feed and clothe and protect and encourage? How can you NOT respect their dreams? Your selfishness fucking dies in that moment.

And if, in that moment, your love is not returned, you love through it. Because even if today you are the only one giving, one day soon there is going to be a resurrection. And on that day, we are all going to finally get it. On that day, we will love. So until that day comes, we do it like he did: we hold on to love and we run with it as hard and as far as we can. Even if it fucking kills us.

Love

is when you look at the cross and skip there
because Heaven and all the fullness of God
were empty
without you. ✯



A Cup of Coffee, Devil's Food Cake, and a Flag Draped Coffin

Elbon Kilpatrick
Jackson, Tennessee

“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward. (Matthew 10:42)”

“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in the both the Lord’s table and the table of demons. (1 Corinthians 10:21)”

While a giant banner drapes over the front entrance of the Northside Assembly of God announcing the Veterans Day Worship Service, this Christian holds his little sign “LOVE YOUR ENEMIES – JESUS” / KILL YOUR ENEMIES – MILITARY to proclaim Jesus’ unconditional love for enemies – even enemies of the United States of America – before church members and members of the military as they arrive to worship their god.

On the boundary line of the church property, fourteen U.S. flags flap in the cold wind of November 9, 2008. Soon, Pastor Devin Kroner, the Children’s Pastor of the church, walks down to the south parking lot entrance where I stand.

“Can I help you?”

“I’m here to protest the church’s honoring of those who violate Jesus’ command to love enemies.”

“I understand.”

“If you understand then why do you honor those who kill enemies rather than love enemies?”

“I think we have a right to defend our country.”

“The early church for the first three centuries taught if you went into the military that you would be excommunicated and if you were converted while in the military you would need to tell your commander that you cannot kill anyone.”

“Would you like some coffee?”

“Sure.”

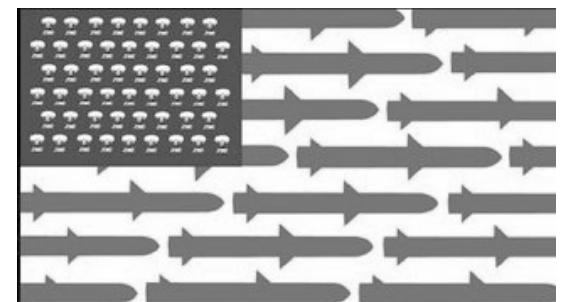
“Would you like it with sugar and cream?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Pastor Kroner leaves and returns with the coffee.

“I accept your coffee with thanksgiving. But just imagine if I took this cup of coffee and poured it out in front of you. I would not be showing gratitude for the gift you gave me. Now, imagine the blood of human beings, whom God has given the gift of life, being poured out by the military who’ve killed them for their country. As Christians, we believe the human body is the temple of God and it is not to be desecrated. I tell you this because this church is honoring those who destroy the temple of God of each human life they maimed, tortured, or killed.”

“I hear what you’re saying. I brought you some donuts.” Pastor Kroner hands me a package of two devil’s food cakes and then returns to his cronies who wait for him in a flag draped coffin called the Church. *



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Thanks for reading and thanks for all of your continued support.

Chris Rooney
Karl Germyn
Editors, The Christian Radical.

I'll not Go Quietly #2

Steven Woods
Polunsky Death Camp

So, I was just sitting there on the grass, not doing anything really. Just kind of laid back hanging out with some friends; people I've never really met before, but know as if they were as close as family. The sun was shining high up in the sky, no clouds marred the great expanse of blue hanging above our heads. The world was all right and I was at peace. I was so caught up in my visions of paradise that I failed to notice at first the rays of light probing my home. It was the banging, and the 'request' for my identification that finally managed to snag my attention. Well, back to reality. I know the easiest course is to just give them what they want, and they'll leave me alone. But, I feel so...violated? Yeah, that's the word. So why should I cooperate? I don't. A simple thing, but I love this little game.

'Woods, what's your number?'
'Shto?' (Russian What)
'Woods, what's your number?'
'Ya Ne Ponemaiyou' (I don't understand)

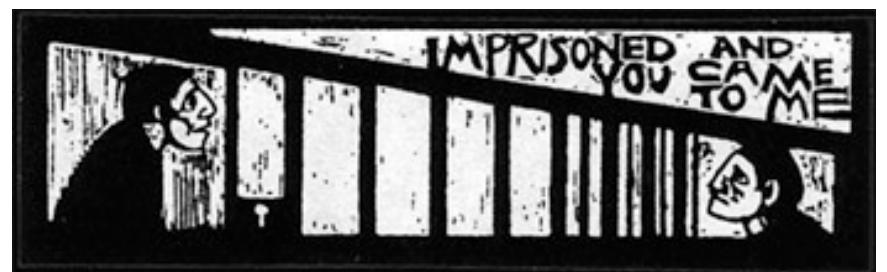
I suppose that you could call me a bit of a troublemaker. What, with my Mohawk hairstyle (totally against grooming standards!), the little games I play with the security guards at times, and my adamant refusal to adhere to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Death Row policy and procedure. I refuse to allow myself to be lead into the complacent, subjugated existence the majority of my 'peers' resign themselves to. I have always been a non-conforming, rebellious individual. It's who I am. I outgrew the naive assumption I once held early on in my stay here; that if I behave myself and follow all of their rules, then maybe they won't kill me. How did that fatuous notion enter my mind in the first place? It isn't much of a mystery; who ever wants to die? But I am a hostage. My freedom was stolen. My humanity and my life are next. And I should just lie down and submit to my captors? I realize that my actions feed the machine and help it speed along its path. I've had so many arguments with myself about it. In the end, it all comes down to: How much injustice am I willing to stand? It's not just that I've been treated unfairly in court. That's a

small concern when it's compared to the oppressive treatment I receive just being on Death Row.

So many people are under the misconception that we lead a relatively good life in prison up until the time of our State sanctioned extermination. Through correspondence with various people throughout the world, I've come to know that most picture us walking around a prison complex freely, unrestrained and dangerous, co-mingling with the other prisoners. They see us watching television, working and doing various other activities. The truth of our situation is, at first, often unfathomable to most of them. The truth is that Death Row is one of the most restrictive and inhumane prison environments that the world offers. Prisoners of war (at least, those not held by Bush) are afforded the protective of the Geneva Convention. Here in U.S. Death Row, we're not even protected by our country's constitution. I don't know about the conditions of most States, but I assume they're all vaguely the same, with Arizona and Texas being the worst. Here in Texas, we're 'Housed' in what's termed a 'control unit prison'. Super Maximum Security Segregation the same type of prisons with the same type of programs in place used by the CIA and KGB during the Cold War to 'break' a prisoner. Conditions proved over the years to be psychologically devastating to those subjected to them. This one, on the Polunsky Unit in Livingston, Texas, holds more than 400 condemned in complete isolation. And despite the steady flow of executions and suicides, we're kept at nearly full capacity. We are held in these cages throughout the six to ten years it takes to complete the appeals process, our spirits so severely crushed that death is often a blessing. I don't know how many men I've watched over the years being lead to the death house, eager to finally be done with it all. The laws against cruel and unusual punishment notwithstanding, we are solitarily confined to concrete and steel tombs no bigger than a large bathroom. In 'Normal' Death Row segregation, the best we can get in Texas (that is, not disciplinary segregation), we're locked into these cells, our homes, 23 hours out of every 24. We're let out for one-hour recreation and shower, visitation once a week, medical (when they deem it necessary) or to go to disciplinary court. We're allowed an AM/FM radio, hot pot, typewriter (if we can afford them), all purchasable from unit commissary. We're also allowed and purchase personal hygiene supplies, limited food stuffs and TDCJ approved publications, all of which must be stored at all times in a 2 foot by 2 foot storage space (or risk a disciplinary case and confiscation) under our steel bunks. Our 'homes' are set up in sections of 14

cell, 7 on tier one and 7 above them. They overlook the day room and guards' picket, affording no privacy what so ever. Unlike Arizona, we do have windows in the back of our cells. Whether this is a blessing or a curse depends on our state of mind on any given day. For me, it's too hard, too painful to look outside into the world, so I normally keep it covered with paper.

We suffer much at the hands of the guards, these men and women who we must rely on for hygiene, health and safety. To say that they don't like us is putting it rather mildly. There are some guards who are only concerned with doing their jobs, the majority feel it is their job to make our lives hell. They swagger around, secure in their minds that they are the only human beings around. They degrade us constantly, spit in our food and face, and do their best to provoke us into confrontations that can potentially destroy our appeals. These people take pleasure in denying us our sleep, our food, our recreation and showers. Any protest is met with ignorance, some with bogus disciplinary cases that remove what little privilege we have. And that's when we're not just out right ignored.



I'm somewhat ambivalent about recreation. I mentioned that the dayroom, where we recreate normally is situated directly between the guards' picket and the cells in our section. It's nearly a 20 foot by 40 foot cage with nothing but a toilet, table and pull up bar. After a strip search shows we're not carrying anything with us (we can't take anything out of our cells) we're placed in hand restraints to be lead the 15 feet to this cage. We recreate alone, because contact with other human beings is not permitted. Most of us spend our hour walking in circles, working out or talking to the other cells. I don't like recreation much, as it generally makes me feel like something of a caged animal at a zoo, inmates and guards alike staring at me. I rarely spend much of this time talking to the

other inmates either. There are several reasons for this, not the least of which is that bonding with someone about to die is hard on the psyche. Another bit turnoff to recreation is that, in a lot of places, there are those wretches who have been completely broken by the psychological trauma of the isolation and the dehumanization tactics used daily. They throw urine and feces at those in the dayroom, stand at the door and masturbate. It's very disquieting. We are allowed to go 'outside' for recreation each week, which is when I normally take my rec. time. It's not much, but it's quiet and bigger than my cage. All it is a concrete room with bars in place of a roof. A partition of Iron bars runs through the center making it the 'rooms', and another inmate is placed into the second one. This is really the only chance a person here has to feel a little like a human being. I've been on the row for three years now, fighting for my life and my right to be treated like a human being. I spend the majority of my life in disciplinary segregation, as do the precious few others who share my views of our situation.

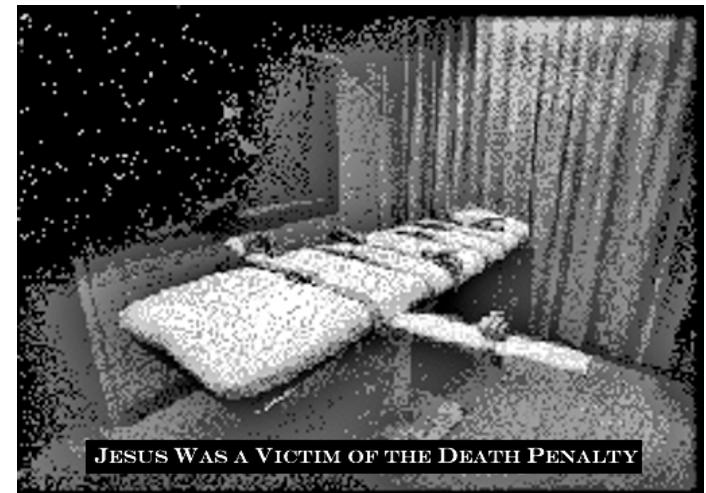
It's a completely different atmosphere than 'Normal' seg. all together. We rarely receive visitors, only allowed one or two a month (depending on disciplinary status). Recreation is limited to one hour a week in most cases. None of us are allowed to purchase from unit commissary, except stamps and hygiene every two weeks. All of our electrical appliances, and the majority of our other property, is removed and often lost somewhere in the property room. But down here, it's more real, we feel more alive, healthier of mind and more able to fight. This may seem a little obtuse, considering that we're rebelling against our inhumane treatment; why make it worse on ourselves? We desensitize ourselves to their punishments. A cause is only worth as much as we're willing to sacrifice for it. We're showing that we will disrupt and disobey their system as much as we can; that they can't take anything from us that we aren't willing to give up. Pulling the fangs from the serpent's mouth, so to speak. Besides our lives, we're not really asking for much. Nothing more than any other prisoners in the State, even non-Death Row Capital murderers, are allowed to have: To be able to work, attend contact visits with friends and family, walk around unrestrained, go to church, and interact with other inmates; maybe an educational program or a bit of television. All of these things (besides contact visits and our lives) we're even supposed to have, according to the United States Supreme Court. But I doubt it will ever happen.

Unfortunately, my unwillingness to submit might have disastrous affects to my appeal. Should I win a reversal, the State will argue that my actions have 'proved' that I'd be a danger to society. Because I don't follow their rules, they'll avow that I won't be able to follow the rules of society in prison or the world. I can only hope that they, especially my jurors, will see my actions for what they are: A struggle against losing my spirit and life to an antiquated and barbaric practice. How could you handle the fact that the system wants you dead; not only dead, but gibbering like a mandrill, all semblance of humanity systematically shorn from your being? How do you beat a machine that's built on fear and hatred, whose cogs and gears grind the highest laws of God and our land into dust between them? All I can do is stand in the middle of the road and throw stones as the juggernaut bearing down upon me. But I'll stand in its path, hoping for a lucky hit. I'll not be moved. I may lose the battle against this machine, but I'll fight it at every step. My life may be taken, but never my will or my humanity.

"At the bottom of the heart of every human being from earliest infancy to the tomb there is something that goes on indomitably expecting – in the teeth of all crimes committed, suffered, witnessed – that good and not evil will be done to him. It is this above all that is sacred in every human being." – Simone Weil

I am a human
being.

In Solidarity,
Steven
Woods



JESUS WAS A VICTIM OF THE DEATH PENALTY

Gay Marriage

Melissa Sillitoe

Personally, I think that marriage should be a private ritual and not legally sanctioned, but whatever. If it is, then it's a civil right. With the passing of Proposition 8 in California, I have felt personally affected since I'm originally from Salt Lake City and was raised in the Mormon church. My parents left this church when I was a child because of their own developing social consciousness that wouldn't let them remain part of a faith that they found to be sexist and racist. It's beautiful to watch Salt Lake City become ground zero for this new important debate in the US around civil rights. A few thousand people--including many of my old friends--rallied in Salt Lake City to protest the Mormon church's huge involvement in passing this hateful, bigoted legislation. The rest of the US is taking notice, and I support those who call for a boycott on Mormon-owned businesses. There are good Mormon people who are not homophobic, but their leadership needs to know that this type of discrimination is unacceptable to most Americans--some of whom didn't vote, sadly--and won't be tolerated. The LDS church can have any bigoted agenda it likes, but when they delve into political and civic life, they deserve the consequences of their actions. I've watched the Mormon church exercise a stranglehold on an otherwise progressive, ethnically diverse, more than 10% gay/lesbian Salt Lake City. And yes, what I said applies to the Catholic church, too, but you can't be from Salt Lake City and not feel personally affected by this particular entrenched conservative force. It's time for Christianity to rid itself of judgment and to embrace the opportunity to actually bring hope, peace, and love to a very troubled world. For example, the Mormon church has a great humanitarian aid track record. When Salt Lake City was chosen as the location of a Hurricane Katrina resettlement camp, people waited in line for two hours to have the privilege of donating food and supplies to people who needed them. It's time for another spiritual sea change; this is such an incredible waste of time and so divisive, all of this judgment, so tiresome, and so fundamentally un-Christian.

❖

The Man in the Green Blanket

Stephen Vincent Kobasa

(for A.L.)

The reporter says:



There is a body

bundled into a green blanket

at the side of the highway.

A white car. The desert.

(Starstruck, Paul crumples,
dust smokes his profile on the
path,

another casualty marking the
way).

Sniffing the air like the Greek king's double,
we tap the corpse with our cameras,
still blind on the Damascus road. ❖

The Opposite of God

Patrick O'Neill

It's a perplexing challenge for believers. How does one use mere words to describe something as stunning and magnificent as God? Many say such descriptions of the Divine are impossible for humans to conjure, but recently a resigned Catholic priest I know gave it a try.

Preaching on Trinity Sunday at Baltimore's Jonah House, Frank Cordaro said Jesus was God in human form, and while we can't easily imagine other manifestations of the Trinity, Cordaro believes we can humbly describe some of the core characteristics of God based on the life of Christ.

To profess faith (a belief) in Jesus, one must follow his example, Cordaro said. As a human in God's form, Jesus left us a model of God to emulate, and Cordaro said that model includes "four essential parts:"

1. Unconditional Love
2. Unlimited Mercy
3. Radical Egalitarianism
4. From the bottom up

The first two are self-explanatory, and set up the next two. Radical egalitarianism basically means there is no status in God's kingdom; we are all equal in God's eyes, kings or paupers. From the bottom up is how God's kingdom manifests itself in the world.

Catholic social teaching refers to the Church's "Preferential Option for the Poor," a value repeated throughout the Gospels as Jesus time and again aligned himself with the poor, the sick, the dispossessed and the powerless.

Cordaro's four points are helpful when we attempt to discover if we are living lives consistent with God's will.

In the 1990s, people started asking, "What would Jesus do?" as a way of questioning if one's actions are in harmony with God's will. Using these four points can expand that question to: "What did Jesus do?"

This matrix can be very illuminating when you plug in a specific personal or societal value and apply the four questions.

Try capital punishment.

Is it loving? No, it's often hateful. Is it merciful? No, it's vengeful. Is it egalitarian? No, it allows those in power to determine that killers are worthless and must die for their crimes. From the bottom up? No, it's from the top down, with those in power on top, imprisoning and killing those on death row at the bottom.

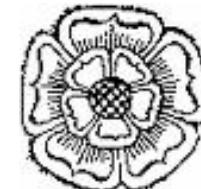
What about how we treat undocumented Latino immigrants?

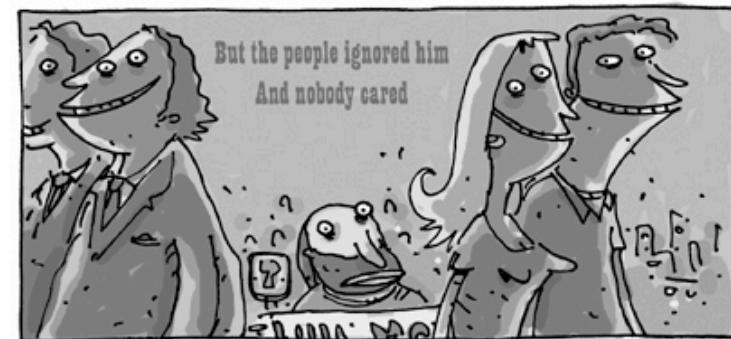
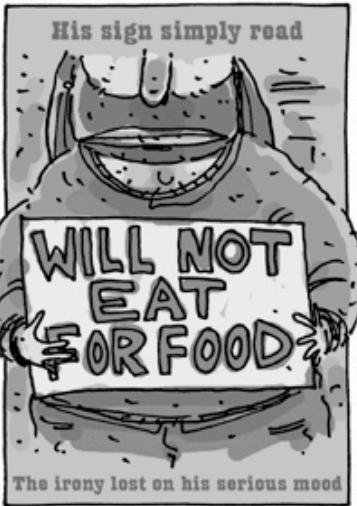
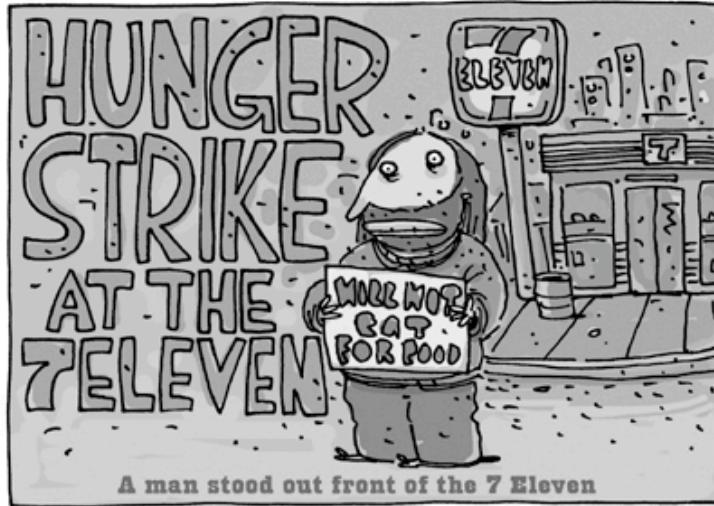
Is it loving? No, many people publicly express their abhorrence of immigrants. Is it merciful? No, we have little mercy for our poor Latino sisters and brothers who come here in search of a better life. Is it egalitarian? No, most Latinos have little status or power in US culture, and many laws have been passed to maintain that disparity. From the bottom up? No, like death row inmates, Latinos are at the bottom, called Illegals and criminals, and crushed from the top down by those in power.

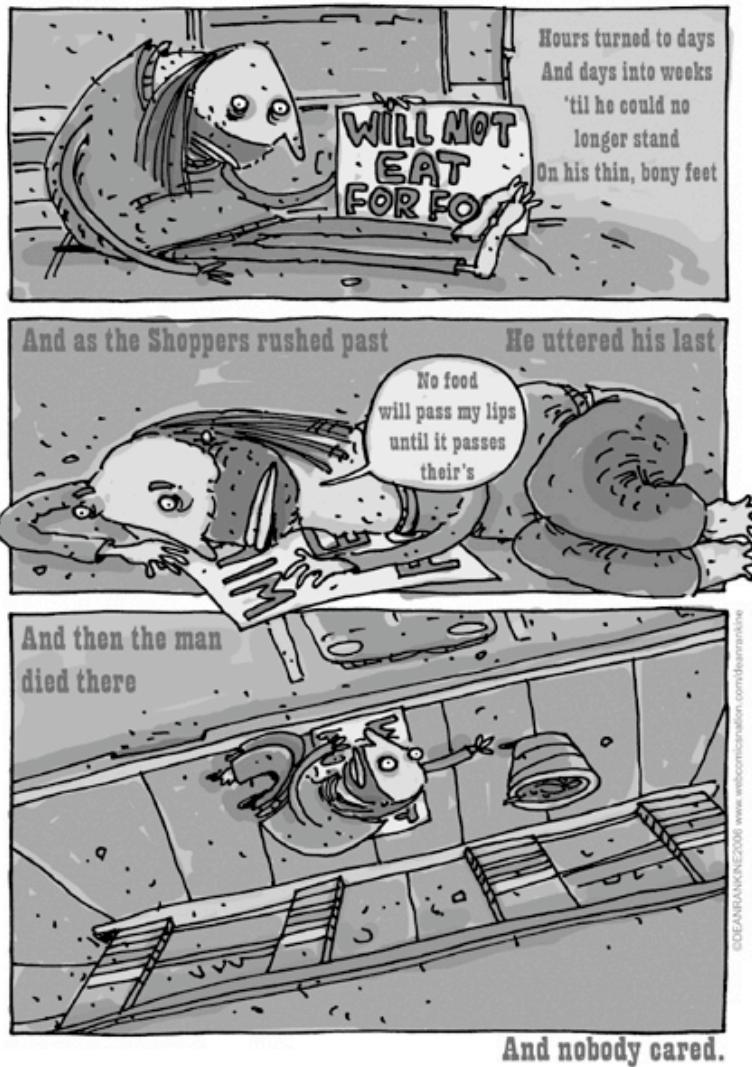
As we ask these questions, we are then confronted with the reality that some values we hold may actually be "the opposite of God," and we all know what that is.

Jesus said you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and you must love your neighbor as yourself.

These injunctions are indeed challenging, but they appear to be the irrefutable truth that emanates from an all loving, all merciful, radically egalitarian Creator who calls us to be in community with society's outcasts. *







The Arrows of White Privilege

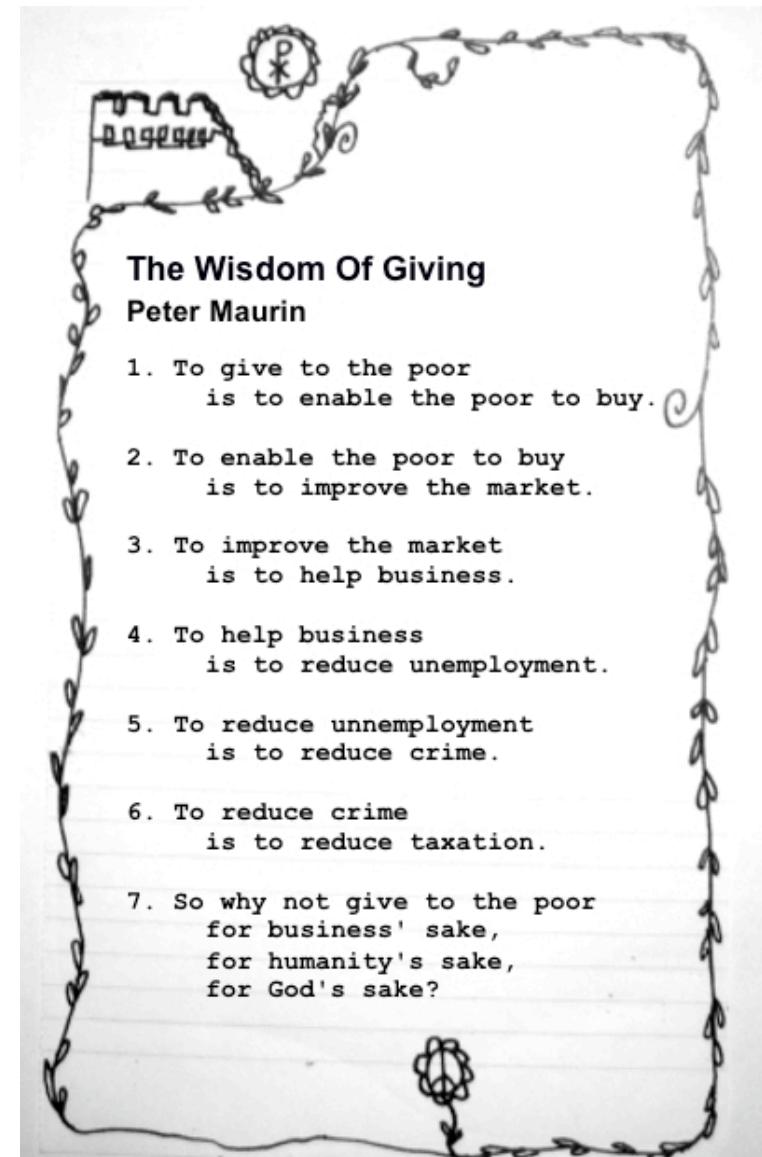
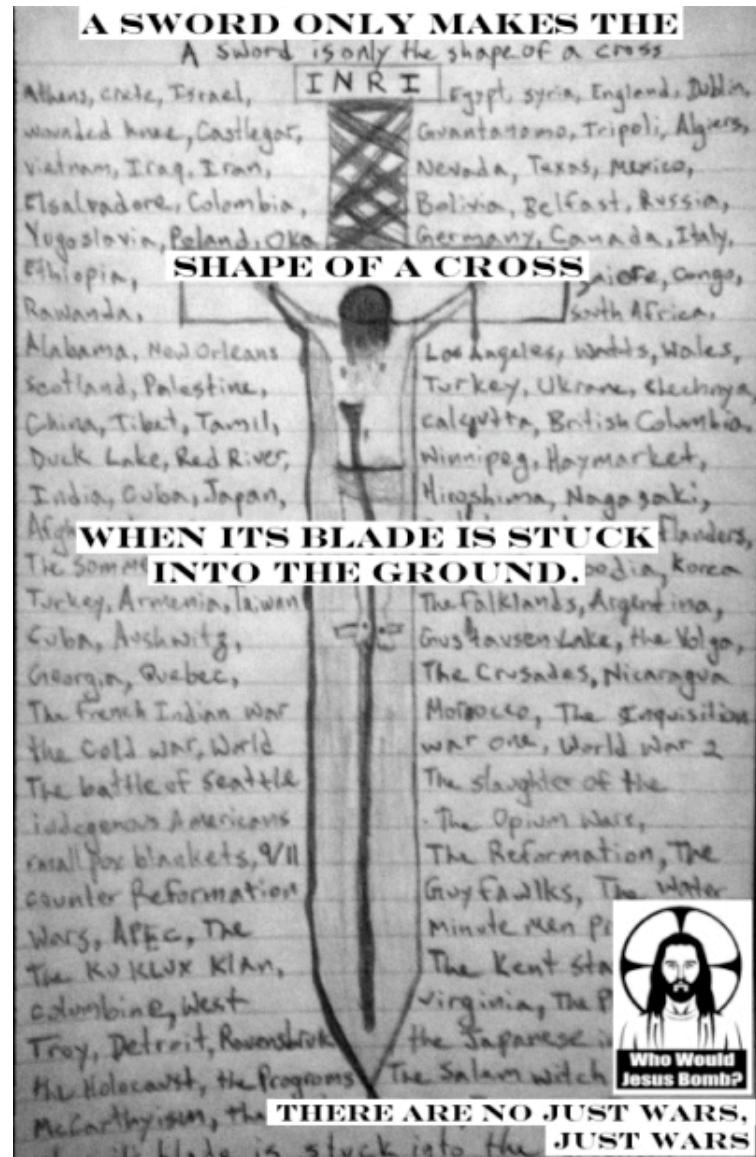
Victoria Marie

November 5, 2008

People of colour, close friends
Empathy, proclaimed
Yet, Joy unshared
Bring arrows of pain
To understand let us
Go back and see
What this old black woman
Saw as a child on TV

Policemen with dogs and hoses
Attack my people huddled
In defensive poses
Angry white crowds shouting, enraged
Because black children with theirs being schooled
While soldiers surround the black children
Protecting their right to what the Supreme Court ruled
Three young men missing, murdered
For helping Black people register to vote
With no one brought to justice
Until 30 years later, a sad footnote

Obama's election, no big deal to you
Full citizenship has always been your right
However, for people of colour, sometimes
Just to stay sane is a fight
"You can grow up to be president"
They tell us in school, but black students face
The constricting clarifying message
"President, not people of your race."
So you see, it's not that he will
Make all the nation's problems go away
But millions of Black Americans
Full citizenship became reality that November day *





We Believe So We Speak

2 Corinthians 4:13

Frank Cordaro lives in the Des Moines Catholic Worker as a member and founder. He has served over 4 1/2 years of jail and prison time for his acts of civil disobedience including a Plowshares action in May of 1998. Frank works full time for peace and justice. You can read his writings at www.desmoinescatholicworker.org

Robert Quinn is a Christian, SFU graduate, and long time resident of North Van. He can be reached at rmquinn@sfu.ca he now lives in Montreal.

Elbon Kilpatrick, is a former federal prison chaplain, and committed to Gospel Nonviolence. Since August 6, 2006, he publicly protests church involvement in mass homicide. You may read more accounts of his protests on the Jesus Radicals website at <http://forums.jesusradicals.com/showthread.php?t=2057>

Melissa Sillitoe lives and writes in Portland's urban neighborhood of Old Town. She is a member of the St. Vincent dePaul Downtown Chapel Catholic parish that takes care of people who are addicted and mentally ill.

Steven Woods is currently serving a death sentence at a State prison in Texas. If you would like to write to Steven you can send mail to Steven Woods #999472 Polunsky Unit 3872 FM 350 S Livingston, TX 77351.

Stephen Kobasa is a writer, activist and Roman Catholic who lives in New Haven, CT. The dedication to "A.L." is to Arthur Laffin of the Dorothy Day CW in Washington, D.C.

Dean Rankine is a part-time Community Development Worker with a Needle and Syringe Program and part-time cartoonist. His comics have appeared in publications worldwide. You can see more of his work online at - www.webcomicsnation.com/deanrankine

Sr. Victoria Marie is a Franciscan Sister of Joy and co-foundress of the Vancouver Catholic Worker where she lives.

Peter Maurin b. May 9, 1877 d. 1949 was visionary and co-founder with Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement. His "Easy Essays" form a cornerstone of the movement's philosophy.

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